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# U.S. Aides Fear Crisis Will End Contras' Effort

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WASHINGTON, Dec. 7 — Many Reagan Administration officials say they are coming to the conclusion that the Nicaraguan insurgency is probably doomed.

They say the disclosure that nearly all the purportedly private money the rebels were able to raise this year had actually come from arms sales to Iran or from sources who contributed only at the urging of the Administration has made them realize just how little money the rebels are able to raise on their own.

At the same time, the recent disclosures appear to have seriously eroded already-weak Congressional support for the rebels, making it questionable whether new United States financing will be approved. And officials say a variety of logistical and other problems make it unlikely that the contras, as the rebels are known, will be able to stage dramatic military successes in time to revive interest in their movement.

The contras have been unable even to dislodge Sandinista troops who have occupied a buffer zone inside Honduras for most of this year. The Nicaraguans are in such firm control of the territory near the main rebel camp in south-central Honduras that "Nicaraguans

are even harvesting the Honduran coffee crop," one official said.

Already some officials are beginning to discuss what will happen if the contra movement dies. "There will be serious pressure from the left to accept an unacceptable regional peace treaty," one Administration official said. "And there will be serious pressure from the right to invade."

While the views of President Reagan and Secretary of State George P. Shultz are not known, other senior officials are saying in public that they believe the contra program will be judged on its merits and not as a part of the Iran arms dispute. But in private, many officials who are directly involved in running the contra program are saying the dispute, as a senior official said today, "is probably a nonrecoverable disaster for the contras."

## Rebel Leaders Pessimistic

Another official who has been closely involved in the contra program for several years said, "If you wanted to bet the smart money, you'd bet that this thing is going to go down the tubes."

Last week the leaders of the main rebel organization, the United Nicaraguan Opposition, also said it appeared that the insurgency might be doomed. "We may now be seen as nothing more than the pet project of a lame-duck President," one said. "If that's the way it is, we're finished."

Administration officials and contra leaders said they had believed that the several million dollars in private donations over the last year had come from "Texas millionaires and others," as Assistant Secretary of State Elliott Abrams said. But the United Nicaraguan Opposition said in an official statement last week that in actuality they had received private donations "not exceeding \$1 million during 1986."

On Saturday Administration officials acknowledged that at the urging of the State Department, Brunei had given several million dollars to the contras, apparently indirectly. But an official said public disclosure of the deal made it unlikely Brunei would give more.

Even with the money from Iran and Brunei and \$27 million in United States aid approved by Congress last year for "nonlethal" purposes, the contras "have just survived," an official said.

"They've kept alive and that's all," he said.

This year Congress agreed to \$100 million in aid, of which \$70 million was in military assistance. Without further

United States help when the \$100 million runs out over the summer, a contra official said, "we may have to pack up."

Asked today on the NBC News program "Meet the Press" if further Congressional financing for the contras was a possibility, Representative Jim Wright, the Texas Democrat who is expected to be the new Speaker of the House, said, "I think it would be a very difficult thing."

## Quick Victories Called Needed

To win renewed support from the United States, Mr. Abrams said last week, the contras "will have to get it for themselves with their performance on the ground, both military and political."

There is a chance the contras could lose part of even the \$100 million. After Feb. 15, Congress has the opportunity to vote to revoke \$40 million of that aid, subject to a Presidential veto.

State Department officials say they are not seriously worried about that. But one senior official said that even before the Iran arms case became a factor, the loss of Republican control of the Senate had prompted many in the Administration to believe they had better urge the contras to score quick military victories.

"There had been a sense that they should be ready to go in March," the official said, "but even before Iran came up people were saying we may have to look like we're making a difference in the January to February time frame, if this thing is to survive."

This official said the United States would probably urge the contras to "carry out significant commando actions or something like that." Another official said, "We could get them to occupy a town for a while or take out some important infrastructure."

But a senior official noted that even if the contras were able to win significant military victories over the 65,000- to 75,000-man Sandinista army — and most officials said they are not capable of that — it would take as much as two months just "to infiltrate enough troops into Nicaragua to fight."

## Aid Is Given Slowly

"Right now, there are 5,000 contra troops in Nicaragua and 13,000 in the camps in Honduras," the official added. Another official noted that the Central Intelligence Agency, which is in charge of dispersing the \$100 million in aid, "has been very, very slow handing it out."

"The contras are complaining about that," the official said. "At this rate, they couldn't even get the gear to them in time to move in January."